

Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes October 11-12, 2007

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

October 11-12, 2007

Wilderness Room

Helena, Montana

Members present: David Boyd, Dan Burke, Jackie Colombe, Denise Corrao, Faith Dawson, Dalayna Faught, Sharla LaFountain (Thursday), Christina Mattlin, Wayne Nankivel, Ron Mills, Dick Trerise (Friday), Claudette Vance, Michelle Williamson, Mavis Young Bear

Members absent: Andrea Falcon, Don Jones (resigned), Maureen Kenneally, Carol Lambert, Paul Pearson, Ruth Straley

Staff and guests present: Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Bob Jahner, Barb Varnum, Scott Williamson, Barb Schiedermayer

Thursday, October 11

Wayne Nankivel called the meeting to order at 10:00. Introductions were made, and the Council reviewed the mission and values statements. The July minutes were approved.

Statewide Independent Living Council

Peggy reported on the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) activities. The Council held a mini-symposium, and identified seven clusters of priority issues to pursue: (1) Medicaid Buy In; (2) living wages and health insurance for personal care attendants; (3) accessible, affordable, integrated housing; (4) more funding for independent living centers; (5) youth issues (disability curriculum in schools, transitioning from school to adult; leadership and independent living); (6) “nothing about us without us” and “money follows the person; and (7) transportation.

Public Comment

Faith Dawson suggested putting the flyer asking for consumer input in Missoula on the door where it will be more visible. She also suggested making it colored to draw more attention to it.

State and national update

Joe presented a certificate to David thanking him for his two terms on the Council.

The MVR state plan and the State Plan for Independent Living were recently approved by the federal government (RSA). RSA has had some turnover in staff, which resulted in a lot of confusion, but Montana was eventually assigned an experienced staff person who provided great suggestions for the plans. Unfortunately, that person retired in early October, and Montana has yet another federal liaison. David Wachter, the new liaison will probably come to Montana in April 2008 with a team of other RSA staff. The team will likely contact many Council members.

Montana did receive \$238,000 in additional federal funds through the reallocation process at the end of the fiscal year. This money will be used for services for clients---the current budget was underfunded.

In the area of Standards and Indicators, Montana met all seven again this year!

Congress is still looking at reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. Normally this occurs every 5 years, but it was last done in 1998. Versions have been introduced in Congress, but it doesn't look like anything will happen this year.

Vocational Rehabilitation is getting ready to gear up for the next Legislature. The executive planning process starts in January. This is the process that begins planning for the Governor's budget. First, programs (like VR) analyze their budgets to see if additional funding may be needed. Areas of need are described and documented. In early spring, programs submit their needs to the department (Department of Public Health and Human Services). The department leadership reviews all the requests from programs, prioritizes them, and submits them to the Governor's budget office. The budget office reviews the requests and decides which of the requests to include in the Governor's budget. Finally, when the Legislature meets in 2009, they decide which of the requests to fund.

Joe recently attended the national Futures meeting, discussing the future of VR (no relation to the Montana Futures Group which is a leadership training program). The national Futures meeting discussed having a national definition of order of selection with the same criteria for each state. Order of selection is used when the state does not have enough money to serve all consumers, so they must establish some kind of order in which to serve people. (Montana does not fall in this category.) Currently, states may decide their own criteria, but that criteria must serve the most significantly disabled consumers first. Over half of the state agencies operate under order of selection.

The Governor's office has shown a significant interest in transitions, and VR is at the table. VR hired Barb Schiedermayer to be a transitions counselor/program manager working out of Missoula. She will work directly with Missoula schools, and also perform some statewide activities. Mavis mentioned that she has a transition counselor on board that directly serves high schools.

Transitions

Barb Schiedermayer, new transition counselor in Missoula, talked about transitions in Montana. Transitions refers to moving from being a student into adulthood. This is the first time VR has had a transition counselor. Barb will be working directly with students in Missoula, and she will have some statewide program manager responsibilities. She will be shaping this new program. First, she will be in the Missoula high schools, and she will have office hours. She wants to work with all the different groups of people: teachers, counselors, university (Disability Services), students, and parents. She wants to make the transition process more clear and streamlined. She is hoping to get information, in an easy to access format, on the web—this information would not just be VR information, but also from other groups too. She is also looking at developing a parent handbook.

Year end stats

Peggy Williams reported on the year end VR statistics:

- VR worked with 7,313 consumers this year (7,771 last year)
- VR helped 912 consumers go to work (909 last year)

- The total annual earnings of consumers who went to work were \$14.4 million (\$13.4 million last year)
- The average hourly wage of the consumers who went to work was \$10.20 (\$9.74 last year)

Montana VR met all seven of the Standards and Indicators set by the federal government.

Native American video

Mavis Young Bear, Section 121 director at Fort Belknap, showed a video she helped make in North Dakota. The video explained the rehabilitation process for consumers in the Section 121 project (Native American Vocational Rehabilitation).

Graduate school issue

Bob Jahner reviewed the proposed procedure on graduate studies. Representatives from the Council and from VR have been working on this since the last meeting. Not all VR consumers are entitled to VR paying for graduate school tuition—specifically, a person who can obtain employment without significant impediment in a professional field consistent with his strengths and interests may not be eligible for graduate school supports. However, VR does pay for graduate school for some consumers.

State plan

Barb Varnum discussed the final State Plan which just approved by the federal agency (RSA). The first part of the plan is a “preprint” listing of requirements the state must meet, and it is the same for all states. The last part of the plan consists of “attachments” which describe different aspects of the Montana program. Specifically, the attachments summarize input from the VR Council; cooperation between Montana VR and other agencies; the Montana VR personnel system; goals and strategies for meeting the goals (also listed in the MVR Strategic Plan); and supported employment services.

Other administrative areas

Barb mentioned that the Blackfeet Reservation recently became the first Reservation nationwide to be certified as a One-Stop. She attended their Career Day and said it was a success. Barb also participated in the federal benefits workshop on the Fort Belknap Reservation.

Barb discussed the 2006 consumer satisfaction survey for VR consumers. Item 11—In an overall general sense, how satisfied are you with the services you received?—received an 86% approval rating (mostly satisfied or very satisfied).

What a VR counselor does (the mystery uncovered...)

Dalayna Faught, VR counselor in Missoula, described what she does as a VR counselor. The Missoula office is busy and she has a large caseload. She handed out a sample case file (identifying information blacked out) so Council members could follow the progression of a case.

Mental illness presentation

Denise Corrao, consumer, presented on the personal aspects of mental illness. She would like to make the presentation at the VR All Staff meeting in the spring.

Friday, October 12

Committee reports

Committee reports are included as appendices A, B, and C.

VR Strategic Plan

Peggy reported on the VR strategic plan. This document was developed by VR management and the Council last summer. Seven representatives from the Council participated in the two day meeting that looked at all the consumer input and honed it into goals and strategies. The Council will review progress on the strategic plan each quarter.

The eight major goals of the plan are:

1. Successfully assist people with disabilities to achieve their employment goals.
2. Assure consistent, high quality transition services are made available statewide.
3. Build awareness and understanding of VR services.
4. Develop opportunities for better jobs and on-the-job supports for people who are working.
5. Enhance VR services specifically for people with mental illness, brain injuries, and learning disorders.
6. Collaborate with other appropriate agencies and 121s to enhance outcomes for consumers.
7. Continue attention to in-service training and meeting CSPD (Comprehensive System of Personnel Development) qualifications.
8. Expand our staff recruitment effort.

Field Services report

Bob Jahner reported on other VR activities. VR recently shortened the time requirements for a consumer who has been determined eligible to the time his plan is written to 120 days. The time may need to be shortened again—this time to 90 days.

VR is still trying to hire a deaf coordinator. VR helps pay for interpreters in college classes, and, in some cases, has used video interpreting (the interpreter is offsite).

A question has come up regarding the number of credits a student who is funded by VR must take in college. VR does not have an official policy on this—in some cases, consumers may take just a few credits at a time. However, since the ultimate goal is work, taking 12 credits can demonstrate a consumer's work stamina.

The Legislature appropriated an increase of 1.85% to VR providers like the community rehabilitation programs and the independent living centers.

Announcements

The Governor has not made the new appointments yet. Peggy has contacted the appointments office a number of times trying to get the appointments made.

Next meeting dates:

- January 17-18 in Helena (NOTE---this may need to be moved)
- Week of April 14 when feds are here (maybe)—note: CEC is April 14-16

- July maybe on a Reservation
- October 9-10 in Helena

Next meeting agenda items (in addition to standard ones)

- Executive Planning Process budget requests
- Visual accommodations—Faith (30 minutes)
- Update on transitions sub-cabinet group
- Issue on paying for cultural healing (Joe will ask feds)

Appendix A
Public Relations Minutes
October 12, 2007

1. PR strategy for television and radio spots:
 - Jackie will contact Montana Tech's technical communications group to create a 30 second PSA.
 - If they are willing to take us on as a project, we will contact television stations in different cities to run spots.
2. PR project for Business Recognition Program:
 - Peggy and office will draft some certificates that can be presented to recognize businesses for their support of people with disabilities.
 - Denise will type a simple nomination form to be used by counselors and others. It can be distributed by email or snail mail.
3. Denise's video is continually being used to educate and inform members within the organization and with other organizations.
 - Peggy is mailing out 3 videos to new council members.
 - Peggy is copying and mailing a copy of the video to the new transitions coordinator, Barb Schiedermayer.
4. Legislative PR strategy:
 - Denise presented the Council with a new idea of handing out thank you cards that would hand around the neck.
 - Carol Lambert will be asked if this is an appropriate idea.

Appendix B
Transitions Minutes
October 12, 2007

The group began with a discussion of the MVR Transitions website. Faith Dawson brought some suggestions regarding how the website could be improved and made more accessible. We discussed the flow of her icons and links. We concluded that Barb S, Brigitte W, Faith D and Marvalee Christofferson needed to work together to advance this discussion.

We also discussed the status of OPI, MYLF, and HHS in terms of websites. We talked about focusing our discussions to the DPHHS/VR website as a collection of current links to important Transitions Information.

Bob Jahner gave everyone an update on the Governors Task Force and how that work might effect both the Transitions subcommittee and also how that might interact with some of Barb S and Brigitte W's initiatives.

We discussed how we might develop a web listing of possible mentors for consumers with sensory disabilities with a focus on deafness. We weighed the merits of approaching the MYLF website as a possible host. We talked about the liabilities of such a list and service as well as the advantages and merits. Mavis cautioned the group about dealing with things at this level of detail for both the agency and other groups. Overall we concluded that there would be merit in opening this discussion with June and the MYLF people keeping in mind Mavis's cautions.

Appendix C
Native American Minutes
October 12, 2007

Members: David Boyd (chair), Michelle Williamson, Barbara Varnum, Jackie Colombe, Ron Mills. Guest: Denise Corrao

Continuing & new goals are as follows:

1) Barbara will contact the 121's regarding their interest in holding the MVR Council meeting on their Reservation. *Barbara Varnum did email all of the 121s in early August, but has not yet received any responses. David Boyd stated that if he is elected for the Tribal Council in Fort Peck, he would like to host the meeting on that reservation. Elections are in November. If David is not elected, Barbara will again contact the 121s.*

2) Request that MVR send a staff member to the annual and biannual CANAR conference, if there is adequate funding. *Barbara attended the annual CANAR conference in Washington, DC in February 2007. A counselor was selected to attend the mid-year conference in Savannah, GA in August. Unfortunately, two days prior to the conference, the counselor had significant medical issues, and was unable to attend. MVR tried to send another counselor in his place, but the airlines refused to allow MVR to switch names on the plane ticket.*

Barbara will be attending the 2008 annual CANAR conference. If funding permits, a counselor will be selected to attend the 2008 mid-year conference. The counselor that is selected will be one that currently works on the Reservation.

3) MVR will continue to encourage MVR staff to attend the Native American Brain Injury conference. *The conference is typically held in the spring, and members will be encouraged to attend this conference.*

4) Provide cultural sensitivity training to the MVR council in the coming year. *Ron Moccasin from Fort Peck is interested in providing cultural training. If the summer meeting is held at Fort Peck, the training will be conducted at that time.*

5) Determine which Reservations will serve members of their Tribe that do not live on or near the Reservations: *This is a new goal. When this goal was reported out to the entire Council, Mavis Young Bear stated that she believes ALL of the 121s in Montana have language in their grant stating that they will serve individuals who live "on or near the reservation." In Fort Belknap, "near the Reservation" is 50 miles from the Reservation boundaries.*

Barbara will contact the 121s to obtain information on what their individual policy is regarding "near the Reservation".